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MyCandidate.eu – the Voter Advice Application for the London Mayoral and Assembly Elections in 2012

Abstract: *In 2011 and 2012 the Centre for Europe, University of Warsaw implemented an online tool, a Voter Advice Application (VAA), with a view to support voters in making an informed choice in the local elections in the UK.¹ The aim of tools like VAA is to foster electoral participation by delivering information about the opinions of the candidates and propose a candidate-to-voter matching scheme. This particular VAA was targeted mainly at the Polish and Lithuanian communities in the UK, as one of the objectives of the European Commission, which co-sponsored the project, was to stimulate EU citizens living outside of their countries to take part in local elections in the place they currently reside. This article shares the findings of the second year of the project, makes some observations and proposals, and concludes by recommending further actions, both to the academic environment as well as to politicians and the European Commission.*

Introduction

In the years 2011-2012 the Centre for Europe of the University of Warsaw headed up a joint project called ‘Voter Advice Application for Poles and Lithuanians eligible to vote in UK local elections,’ co-financed by the DG Justice of the European Commission and the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Together with its partners, the non-governmental organi-

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¹ The project ‘VAA for Poles and Lithuanians eligible to vote in the UK local elections’ was co-funded by the European Union’s Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme and the Polish Ministry of Higher Education.

zation MyPolitiq from Lithuania and two British universities (Loughborough and Leicester), the Centre for Europe set the goal of using the VAA as a tool which might encourage migrant communities to vote in their current place of residence and to do so in a responsible way. Such an objective required not only organizing a promotion campaign for participation in elections, but also the dissemination of knowledge about the views of each candidate. The views held to be of importance for such dissemination are those in areas of social life which have the strongest influence upon the quality of life and on how people assess the effectiveness of the actions of public authorities.² The new project idea was created with both social and scientific objectives. Firstly, the Voter Advice Application (VAA) could help migrants within the EU with their electoral decisions, empower their social participation, and thereby boost election turnout. Secondly, the data collected by the statistical software could be used for further studies on migration and voters' behaviour.

This paper describes the actions carried out in 2012 and discusses the effects of such actions, while at the same time demonstrating the way in which the lessons learned from the 2011 VAA edition were subsequently incorporated into the activities of the 2012 edition. Such changes, which included the improvement of IT tools, the organization of the project team implementing the website myCandidate.eu, and gaining users are described in the lead up to the final analysis of the VAA results in 2012 and the consequent findings.

1. The experience of 2011 and the lessons learned

There was a first edition of the myCandidate.eu project in the year 2011, which led to detailed research on the reality of local elections in the UK and to the needs and requirements for technical work on the IT tool. The actions undertaken in 2011 by the project team can be summed-up in the following points:

- A. Designing the Internet application for the Voter Advice Application, which is an open source code based on the methodology of comparing sets of answers given by the application's users.
- B. Research on local elections in 2011 in the UK, which incorporated the structure of such local elections, the number of such elections, the electoral systems used, and the authorities being elected.

² 'VAA for Poles and Lithuanians eligible to vote in UK local election' – survey conducted before the elections for Mayor of London and the London Assembly Members, Centre For Europe, University of Warsaw, June 2012, p.2, unclassified.

- C. The design and launch of the myCandidate.eu website with adjustment of the layout tailored for UK elections, as well as versions of the website in three languages (English, Lithuanian, Polish).
- D. Creating for the local elections a questionnaire containing 18 questions on important topics for the local community, such as social security, safety, and education.
- E. Designing the statistical software for the website and the additional questions for the questionnaire.
- F. Creating the database of candidates, press and other media for the Polish and Lithuanian minorities and other important actors during the elections (electoral officers, local level political party leaders, organizations informing the public about the elections, and organizations working for the Polish and Lithuanian minorities living in the UK).
- G. Mailing, calling and meeting persons and institutions listed on the database in order to invite them to participate in the project and/or disseminate the information further.
- H. Registration of the candidates.
- I. Internet promotion of myCandidate.eu, effected by the use of the website banner and google AdWords targeted to Poles and Lithuanians living in the UK.
- J. Collecting the data derived from the application, analysis of the data, and further academic studies.
- K. Collecting and archiving the press releases concerning the project.

All the partner organizations were responsible for the project to some extent and the work was divided up on the basis of the specializations of the partners. MyPolitiq covered the IT work and Internet promotion, while the universities were engaged in research and contacting both key people and institutions, either by meeting them in person or by email and phone. The most important lessons that can be derived from this first round of the myCandidate.eu project could be listed as follows:

Firstly, with reference to points A), C) and E), the use of the open source code of the Voter Advice Application and its technical capabilities was adequate for the project's purpose. i.e. of making the tool available to the Poles and Lithuanians who lived in UK. Therefore the application could successfully be used again in the next project edition.

Secondly, with reference to the actions described in points B), F) and G), getting in touch with local authorities and politicians in order to persuade them of the benefits of the use of VAA was difficult, since local elections in the UK are very decentralised. The election structure is diversified and most of the campaigns are straightforward and based on walking door-to-door, so

neither candidates nor voters tend to use the Internet in search of information about the election.

Thirdly, a consequence of an attempt to cover the whole electoral map of the UK with VAA was that the questionnaire (point D) was required to be relevant for the whole UK, and consequently was rather general in nature. There was no space to ask people about specific local issues, but only some basic matters concerning all local communities. Besides, the questionnaire appeared to be too long in terms of its attractiveness for users. Many of them quit responding before getting to the final questions. Hence it was evident that not only were the 18 questions to be answered tedious, but the tedium could have been aggravated by the fact that the questions were divided into several sections, each on a different subpage that the user had to move to and from by clicking. Nonetheless the basic principle had to be maintained that the questionnaire could not be too short and easy for voters, as the objective is to give the voter a consistent analysis of the fit of each candidate's views. Thus a compromise had to be found between convenience and comprehensiveness. Hence it was decided that the 2012 questionnaire would be limited to a smaller number of questions and appear more transparent for users, who could view all the questions together.

Fourthly, the dissemination of information as described in point H) mainly targeted Poles and Lithuanians, so the message to politicians was that the project concerned mainly the Polish and Lithuanian minorities in the UK. This message may not have been catchy enough for political circles and the two minority target groups could have seemed to them to be a relatively fringe voting bloc in relation to all the people eligible to vote. This created a negative spiral effect, as the low level of interest in the website on the part of the candidates consequently generated little traffic, which meant that the tool was destined not to be popular in the UK as a whole.

Fifthly, the experiences derived from the activities described in points H), I), and J) confirm the impact of mass media on the spread of information about the project among the politicians and voters, which has the potential to raise their awareness of the VAA and to convince people to use the tool. Even a limited use of Internet marketing tools notably increased the potential users who viewed the myCandidate.eu website.

Sixthly, as deduced from point I), there is a link between the small number of candidates registered on myCandidate.eu and the low numbers of potential voters using the tool. The candidates were not much interested in VAA if it was not going to help them get the voters' attention. This attitude on the part of the candidates weakened the project team's attempts to empower voters with information which would facilitate their election decisions.

2. Putting into practice the lessons learned

2.1. Setting a new agenda

In December 2011, at the end of the first year of the two-year project, the team was able to reflect together on the outcomes and to point up those actions which should constitute priorities for the next project year. The conclusions were as follows:

- a. The IT system was to stay the same since there had been no apparent problems or difficulties the previous year.
- b. Since the local elections in UK are particularly decentralised it would be better to focus on a smaller but densely populated area, where the campaigning is well commented on in the media and people are more likely to look for information about the candidates on the Internet. The team decided to focus only on London, where fortuitously local elections were to take place in 2012. In designing the VAA in 2012 only for London, the questionnaire could then contain questions specific for this city which could be matched with the issues that Londoners face every day.
- c. The questionnaire would be limited to a smaller number of questions, which would cover the local authority themes.
- d. The message to people had to be adapted to fit the target group. In order to reach the candidates, VAA requires popularisation as a universal tool and not as one specifically designed for Poles and Lithuanians. There was concern that the identification of the project as concerning Polish and Lithuanian minorities might have reduced the interest in VAA as a complex political marketing tool. It was supposed that political circles may be more interested in a tool which reaches all types of voters. At the same time Poles and Lithuanians still needed a specific message designed for them which would approach them better than the general UK news about the elections and that otherwise might not reach these eligible voters. This communication with non-UK nationals is not only about encouraging them to visit myCandidate.eu, but also about informing them that they can take part in the local election in an EU country other than the country of their origin.
- e. In order to attract candidates and voters, more attention to myCandidate.eu had to be stimulated in the media. The direct cooperation with political parties, which for the most part failed in 2011, should not be expected to be much different in 2012. The actors who were more likely to cooperate were media and social organizations, so a larger number of them should be contacted directly. However, the most

effective means of communication seemed to be the indirect channels. Therefore it was decided that e-marketing would be the main driver of the communication this year.

- f. The major assumption was that in order for the whole project to empower voters with the VAA tool, more candidates needed to be registered on myCandidate.eu. Improvement in this field in comparison to the previous year was considered to be the one thing most needed in 2012 in order to boost the project.

Hence the project goals in 2012 were set, and the team made an 'adjustments plan' derived from the lessons learned, which was planned to be put into practice in 2012 as follows:

- a) Research into the local elections in London in 2012, based on gathering relevant information about the electoral system, would be reflected in the necessary website updates.
- b) Creation of a questionnaire for London.
- c) Launching the website and VAA with the new questionnaire and current electoral information in three language versions (English, Lithuanian, Polish).
- d) Creating the database of candidates and other important actors during the London elections, as well as media channels such as press and radio (English, Polish, Lithuanian).
- e) Organising a promotional campaign informing Polish and Lithuanian media and organizations about the upcoming elections and the electoral rights of EU participants.
- f) Organising a promotional campaign aimed at getting candidates to register on the website. In order to do so, the project team contacted persons and institutions from the database and invited them to participate in the project by registration (if candidates) or by otherwise by disseminating the information about VAA further.
- g) Promotion of myCandidate.eu, effected by the use of website banners, google AdWords and facebook targeted to Poles and Lithuanians living in the UK.
- h) Collecting the data derived from the application, analysis of this data, and passing this along to academics for further studies.
- i) Collecting and archiving the press releases concerning the project.
- j) Comparative analysis of the two project years.

2.2. The specific election of 2012

The London Mayoral and Assembly elections, which were to be held in London in 2012, gave the project the opportunity to make myCandidate.eu

more visible than the year before for a variety of reasons. Firstly, London as a metropolitan capital city is a high profile arena for political debate, which engages top politicians and raises much emotion towards issues connected with the elections. The sheer size of London gives the discussion of the elections a solid grounding in virtual space. This cannot be said about many smaller communities in the UK, where the local campaigns seem to be more direct in nature. For the myCandidate.eu team the combination of these factors meant that the VAA might be a more relevant tool in London than in smaller communities.

Secondly, another important advantage was that London is city place where many migrants from Poland and Lithuania have taken up residence, with the consequential development of a diversity of media channels and organizations concentrating on these groups.

Thirdly, the decision to focus on London allowed the project experts to work on a questionnaire which would be matched specifically to the character of this particular place and to issues that residents of London face every day. The project team realised that the search for local issues which would be common for the whole UK in the 2011 elections had proven problematic, given that all of the questions had to fit specific local circumstances.

As the VAA in 2012 was to be designed for the London Mayoral and Assembly election, it was crucial for the project team to obtain a genuine understanding of how these elections are constructed by carrying out research on this particular voting system. This resulted in the following summarization of the process to be used as the basis of the plan:

The purpose of the Mayoral Election is to choose one politician who will hold the position of local authority representing Greater London with its 25 districts, plus London City. The specific competence of the Mayor of London is to plan the policies and execute the strategies for dealing with London's everyday problems and continuing development. The power over London resides in the hands of the Mayor of London only since the year 2000, when the mayoral elections were decentralised. This post does not correspond to that of the Lord Mayor of the City of London, a post that has more than 800 years of tradition, and which currently is only of ceremonial importance, whereas the Mayor of London *'has a range of specific powers and duties, and a general power to do anything that will promote economic and social development, and environmental improvement'*.³

³ The Mayor of London Website: <http://legacy.london.gov.uk/mayor/role.jsp> (last visited 12.09.2012).

The candidates for the Mayoral election are previously chosen at the political party level, and then in a direct election with a Supplementary Vote System (SVS). In this system, those entitled to vote have two choices, a first preference marked as the 'first choice' and a second one marked as the 'second choice'. A candidate who receives at least fifty per cent of the 'first choice' votes is the winner. If no candidate attains this 50% threshold, then the results of the two candidates having the most 'first choice' votes are upgraded with the 'second choice' votes they received from people whose 'first choice' was someone other than the two leading candidates. In 2012 there were seven candidates standing in the Mayoral Election, six of whom were representatives of political parties, and one independent.

For the London Assembly, twenty-five representatives are elected by means of the Additional Member System (AMS). Fourteen members are chosen from the fourteen constituencies, which taken together cover the whole of London. The remaining eleven members represent the whole city and they are elected from the so-called London-wide list, which requires political parties to obtain a minimum of five percent of the total votes in order to get any seats. The role of the London Assembly is mainly to oversee the executive, monitor the situation in the city, and give recommendations to the Mayor. The Assembly also controls the Mayor's work particularly in matters connected with transportation, criminality, real estate, and the environment.⁴ This body also has a right to intervene in the London budget, which the Assembly can modify by a two-thirds majority vote. Each Assembly constituency in London usually numbers between 300 and 400 thousand registered voters. Taking into consideration the large scale, this means that even the members elected from the constituencies would not be able to do a door-to-door campaign.

2.3. Creation of the questionnaire

As can be deduced from a perusal of the competencies of the Mayoral and Assembly authorities, both are concerned with similar issues for Londoners, which made it easier for the project team to construct a single questionnaire that would cover both the Mayoral and Assembly elections. The objective of the project experts who worked on the questions was to include topics in the questionnaire which would be deemed relevant for most London residents, and the team came up with the following subjects as topical for such voters: the street riots in 2011 and the issue of use of force by the police to combat them; aspects of social security, particularly those regarding the raising of children; the impact of the economic situation on the job market. Although

⁴ Greater London Authority Website: <http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-london-assembly/about-london-assembly> (last visited 15.09.2012).

there was a multitude of possible topics for questions, it was clear from the feedback on the 2011 research that the 2012 questionnaire should be shorter in order to make filling it in easier and quicker for both politicians and voters, as it had been observed that both parties find all kinds of Internet surveys tiresome, skip the last questions, and do not finish the survey. Thus it was decided on a total number of 16 questions. Additionally, there were also 9 optional questions, which could be used for obtaining statistical data on the respondents. The users could answer the additional questions after completing their questionnaire.

The questionnaire questions are listed below. The respondents' had five possible answers: *Agree, Partly agree, Partly disagree, Disagree, Don't know*. They could optionally value each question by marking whether they care about it little, average, or very much. The 2012 questionnaire included the questions listed in Chart 1 (given in the form of statements with which the respondents could agree, disagree etc).

There was also an interview form, which the users could optionally answer after they had filled out the VAA questionnaire. It included general questions concerning gender, age, nationality, education, income, as well as: 'I care about what my neighbours think of my actions (YES/NO)', 'I expect to live in the neighbourhood I am living now for a long time (YES/NO)'. Moreover, for non-national users, there were also some specific questions, as listed in Chart 2 below.

Once the questionnaire had been completed, the IT professionals could launch the website and VAA with the new questionnaire and add current electoral information in the three language versions (English, Lithuanian, Polish).

Chart 1.

- **Category: Leisure**
 - Question 1: Cultural events and public space for cultural exchanges are available in my neighbourhood.
 - Question 2: The number of accessible places for leisure activities is satisfactory.
- **Category: Safety**
 - Question 3: I feel safe walking in my neighbourhood after dark.
 - Question 4: The police can always be counted on.
- **Category: Education**
 - Question 7: The cuts in the EMA strongly affect access to education.
 - Question 8: The increase in tuition fees to £ 9,000 a year strongly affects access to higher education.

- **Category: Environmental protection**
 - Question 11: Carbon emissions should be a Mayoral priority.
- **Category: Costs of life**
 - Question 10: Londoners' fuel bills should be a Mayoral priority.
 - Question 12: Londoners pay too large an amount of their income in rent.
 - Question 13: Transport fares are too high.
- **Category: Healthcare and social assistance**
 - Question 5: A group of 240 healthcare professionals warned that the health and social care bill is an 'embarrassment to democracy' in mid-March. Do you agree?
 - Question 6: Grants for childcare for low income families should be provided.
 - Question 14: Local authorities carry out their duties in the area of social services in a satisfactory way.
- **Category: Employment**
 - Question 9: Work in the UK is available for all who seek it.

Chart 2.

- When did you arrive in Britain?
- Is your life better now than it was in your country of origin? (YES/NO)
- Do you feel at home in Britain? (YES/NO)
- Would you like to stay in the UK for a long time? (YES/NO)
- Is your place in the UK social structure higher than in your country of origin? (YES/NO)
- Did you vote in the most recent elections in your home country? (YES/NO)
- Have you ever voted in Britain? (YES/NO)
- Did you attend religious services in your home country? (YES/NO)
- Do you attend religious services in Britain? (YES/NO)

3. Creating the database of candidates and other important actors

Following the procedures set up in 2011, this stage of the project involved gathering data on the candidates and other important actors. This task was entrusted to the liaison team from the University of Warsaw, which was made up of a group of four part-time working students as assistants, and the project

manager to oversee the team. The team searched the 2011 database and looked for all possible contacts in London, which turned out to be mostly political party headquarters. They then searched ‘The Public Service Exchange’ database for the 2012 elections in London and incorporated the results into the project database. The liaison team also started a new search for contacts to the candidates and people working on the London elections. The database was to be used in two out of the three planned promotion stages. i.e. in the first stage, which would be focused on raising the awareness of migrants of their electoral rights, and in the second stage, which would seek to get candidates to register on myCandidate.eu.

A new objective, in comparison to the 2011 approach, was to create a much more extensive database of media and organizations which could help spread information about the project and website. Consequently the new strategy was that in 2012 many social media and institutions were to be approached. Media, social media and communities where migrants gather could also be used for the dissemination of information about the project among migrant voters. The previous year the project team had met with a number of people in the UK who work for organizations focused on the Polish and Lithuanian communities, democracy issues, and politics. Reaching all these actors was budget-consuming and time-consuming, and many of them did not engage in the VAA project. Hence in 2012 the team decided to first try to reach these groups through the virtual media.

A database was set up in order to keep a clear record of who had already been contacted, how many times, who not yet been contacted, and how the liaison team divided the work among its members. In total the database had 606 records containing different actors related to the London election and their various contacts, depending on what could be found (office address and telephone, email, facebook, twitter, website). The five main categories of records are listed below:

- Media: newspapers, news websites, radio stations, foundations and NGOs, church congregations, political parties’ headquarters – 92 records;
- London boroughs’ websites, fanpages – 14 records;
- Candidates in the London Mayor and Assembly Elections – 199 records;
- Public Services: Electoral service managers and heads of democratic services and other officials from London Boroughs – 113 records⁵;
- Political party leaders from London Boroughs – 189 records.

⁵ These contacts were obtained from a database ‘The Public Service Exchange’ purchased for the project from Oscar Research Ltd.

4. Promotion of the project

There were three promotional stages of the project in 2012, which should be assessed separately, putting into practice the lessons learned in points E), F), G). By 'promotion' we mean a series of actions undertaken in order to promote the VAA. Since there were many different types of actions, they were divided into three groups, which constitute the three stages described in points below.

4.1. Stage 1. Promotions informing the Polish and Lithuanian media and social organisations about the upcoming elections and the electoral rights of EU participants

This First Stage in 2012 was seen as a prelude to the other two stages. It consisted of sending out some initial information about the London local elections to the media and organizations dedicated to Poles and Lithuanians. This was done by mailing, phone calls and through Internet fora. The objective of this Stage was to introduce the electoral rights of EU citizens to non-UK nationals, along with some practical tips on how to register to vote, as well as some information about the VAA project.

From the database, over 100 records were selected for further contact. They were various types of organizations, some of them dedicated to Polish and Lithuanian minorities and some English media and social organizations with strong local coverage in London. Political party headquarters were also included in this list in the hope of interesting some political actors in the project. Between the 5th and 4th weeks before the election these 100 recorded contacts were contacted with a message encouraging them to inform the public about the right to vote in London elections for all EU citizens living there, with instructions on how and when to register to vote in the London elections. There were approximately 100 messages sent in that period, with the contents adjusted according to the profile of the organization addressed. For instance the message to the Polish churches were different in terms of both language and register from those sent to the English language daily newspapers. Among a hundred and six organizations reached, there were 25 newspapers (22 British and 3 Polish), 5 Polish church congregations, 38 NGOs or foundations (31 Polish, 4 British, 3 Lithuanian), 2 Polish radio stations, headquarters of 9 political parties, and 14 London borough websites or fanpages.

During this Stage, the liaison team also focused on the visibility of myCandidate.eu on facebook. From the end of March until the election there were updates on the project fanpage every two days. Moreover, the myCandidate.eu fanpage put 'likes' to all the media and social organizations in the database that were on facebook. At that point, the major task was to inform

the Polish and Lithuanian media and social organizations about the upcoming elections and the electoral rights of EU citizens.

Stage 1 resulted in press releases in the following media in London: *elondyn.uk*, *thewiza.com*, *polonia-worcester.co.uk*, *polemi.co.uk*. The newspapers and websites mostly published the letter sent by the liaison team describing where the reader could find information about how to register to vote. The dissemination of this information was intended to raise electoral awareness in the month before the election. An additional benefit from this stage for the project team was that by contacting the media about this initial activity some media contacts were early on established, which facilitated the subsequent contacts for the following stages of the project.

4.2. Stage 2. Promotion aimed at getting candidates to register on the website

The Second stage was based on the practice of the previous year: mailing all the potential candidates and people who work on the election campaigns in order to get candidates registered on *myCandidate.eu* website. The difference from 2011 was in the content of the message, as the 2012 VAA was basically promoted as a political marketing tool which would serve the public. The scientific value of VAA and the focus on chosen national minorities, factors which had been highlighted in 2011, were given less exposure.

The candidates were the most precious contacts in the database due – one could say – to their scarcity value! The list of confirmed candidates was officially released four weeks before the election. Until that date, only some of them were known. Right after the list was published, the liaison team was ready to send emails to all of them, but it turned out that while the candidates published their postal addresses, barely half of them had given their e-mail address. Thus for those who could not be reached by email, the liaison team had to send letters by regular post. Those with e-mail addresses received four e-messages from the liaison team at intervals of about five days apart. The number of candidates standing in the London Assembly election were as follows (sorted by their party affiliation):

- British National Party – 16 candidates
- Christian Peoples Alliance – 25 candidates
- Communist League – 1 candidate
- Communities United Party – 1 candidate
- Conservative Party – 26 candidates
- English Democrats – 9 candidates
- Green Party – 23 candidates
- Greenwich and Lewisham People Before Profit – 1 candidate
- Labour Party – 22 candidates

- London Liberal Democrats – 22 candidates
- National Front Putting Londoners First – 6 candidates
- Residents’ Association of London Official – 1 candidate
- The House Party – 1 candidate
- The Socialist Party (GB) – 2 candidates
- Trade Unionist And Socialist Coalition – 8 candidates
- UK Independence Party: Fresh Choice for London – 22 candidates
- Independents – 4 candidates

Table 1 below presents the number of e-mails sent to the candidates and public services and political party leaders by date. Due to the time which the postal service required to deliver the mail, the post-dispatch was made first. Then the liaison team sent e-mails almost every day right until election day. There were four rounds of e-mailing, which means that every candidate whose e-mail address or facebook profile was available received a message about the project four times.

In the case of the Mayoral election, the liaison team used the contacts to the candidates’ press officers as well as those of the candidates. Seven candidates and three press officers were contacted.

Table 1. Rounds of mailing

Round	Date of dispatch	Number of messages sent to candidates	Number of messages sent to public services and political party leaders
1 st	05.04.2012*	86	
	7.04.2012	34	56
	08.04.2012	7	79
	09.04.2012	39	109
2 nd	10.04.2012	19	48
	13.04.2012	31	56
	13.04.2012	60	
	15.04.2012	52	176
3 rd	20.04.2012	27	109
	21.04.2012	30	1
	24.04.2012	31	127
4 th	25.04.2012	50	109
	29.04.2012	31	127
	Total	437	1057

* letters sent by regular post

Alongside the candidates, there were also other actors who were deemed to be potential facilitators in reaching the candidates. The public service officials and political party leaders at the London level were also e-mailed several times starting four weeks before the election. Around 300 contacts assigned to this group of records were e-mailed in four rounds. This target group mainly represented the most popular political fractions; 43% of them were from Labour, 32% – from Conservative, 16% – from Liberal Democrats, and 2% – from Green. There were also some other political affiliations represented, including Residents' Association of London, No Overall Control Administration, and Independent.

A further action in this stage was to send out the messages about the myCandidate.eu website once again to all the media considered to be of interest. However this time the message was not about how to register to vote but was an invitation to visit the myCandidate.eu website, where there were already candidates registered. Between the 12th and 27th of April there were around 100 emails sent, which resulted in publicity in Cooltura magazine, polemico.uk, and a broadcast on radio (Polskie Radio Londyn).

In total, this promotional stage amounted to approximately 1600 letters and e-mails sent to 590 different persons. The results were articles in the press, radio broadcasts, website publications, and above all in the candidates who registered on myCandidate.eu (described further in section E.1 Registered candidates).

4.3. Stage 3. Internet promotion of myCandidate.eu

While the database was used for direct contacts with people in London by the liaison team from the University of Warsaw, the third type of promotion – e-marketing – was conducted by the marketing experts from MyPolitiq. In 2012 this Internet promotion was stepped up to become ten times more intensive than in 2011, both in terms of expenditure and outcomes sought. The previous year had shown the potential of communication channels such as tools provided by google and the placing of banners on websites. MyPolitiq decided to also add facebook marketing as a promotional channel, considering it as the second most influential method next to google. In comparison with the other promotional stages, which were based on the creation and use of a database, the Internet promotion had the advantage of requiring considerably less manual work involving searching and then mailing, but the disadvantage was that it was much more costly. In the case of the London elections it was possible for the project team to do an intensive VAA Internet promotion because the project covered only this one highly concentrated area. Thanks to the size of London's population, there were many recipients of the Internet banners and ads, so the outputs of the promotion were rela-

tively high and the Third Stage could have an impact on the elections and yield adequate results. The Internet promotion consisted of three elements: facebook, google searches and banners, as well as articles on websites. These three channels are described in the points below.

- **Step 1.** The preparation, implementation and optimisation of advertising campaigns on the social network facebook.com.

The First Step of Internet promotion consisted of nine different actions undertaken on facebook and designed to attract residents of London, including Lithuanian and Polish emigrants. The actions had more than 12 million views and 2,592 people clicked the ads. Table 2 presents details regarding the promotion of the project on facebook: the specification of the target groups, and numbers related to it.

Table 2. Project promotion of facebook

	Number of users	Target group specification	Results
1	19,620	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live within 50 miles of London • Age 21 and older • Speak Lithuanian 	Audience reached 14,773 Views 507,322 Clicks 160
2	22,480	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live within 50 miles of London • Age 18 and older • Speak Lithuanian 	Audience reached 18,238 Views 635,173 Clicks 209
3	736,180	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live in United Kingdom or Lithuania • Age 18 and older • Speak Lithuanian 	Audience reached 297,918 Views 3,882,553 Clicks 1,064
4	152,320	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live within 50 miles of London • Age 18 and older • Speak Lithuanian or Polish • Like political parties 	Audience reached 39,794 Views 662,363 Clicks 85
5	70,200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live within 50 miles of London • Age 18 and older • Speak Polish 	Audience reached 44,868 Views 963,768 Clicks 377
6	6,650,160	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live within 50 miles of London • Age 18 and older • Speak English or Polish 	Audience reached 422,121 Views 2,348,498 Clicks 371
7	51,560	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who live within 50 miles of London • Age 18 and older • Who like politics 	Audience reached 36,236 Impressions 1,126.579 Clicks 270
8	54,180	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live within 50 miles of London • Age 18 and older • Like politics 	Audience reached 31,264 Views 845,880 Clicks 154
9	6,791,360	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live within 50 miles of London • Age 18 and older 	Audience reached 408,166 Views 1,462,057 Clicks 262

Facebook ads were distributed to nine target groups defined by the VAA marketing team (in the third column of the table above). The promotion was dedicated to adults living in London and the surrounding area, who speak English, Polish or Lithuanian, and who (optionally) are interested in politics.

- **Step 2.** The preparation, implementation and optimization of advertising promotion on the google search engine and on Lithuanian and Polish websites through the web banner placements.

In the second step of Internet promotion, effected by the use of banners and google, there were two actions designed to attract the attention of voters. Developed promotions reached more than 770 thousand impressions and 902 clicks. The First action was based on the ads displayed on the google search engine, while the users were typing one of the chosen keywords. The full keywords list included the following words and expressions: Vilnius, lietuva, sportas, krepšinis, lietuviai, londone, anglijoje, verslas, karjera, politika, rinkimai, anglija, lietuviai, mokslas, sveikata, sveikagyvensena, darboagentūros, darboskelbimai, anglijoje, lietuvosnaujienos, london mayoral election 2012, candidates london mayor 2012, london mayoral elections 2012, london mayoral candidates.

The second action activated the banners shown on the following websites: basketnews.lt, lrytas.lt, balsas.lt, technologijos.lt, alfa.lt, zebra.lt, anglia.com, londonietis.lt, delfi.lt, pazintys.lt, krepšinis.net, draugas.lt, one.lt, 15min.lt, tv.lrytas.lt, super.lrytas.lt, eli.mama.lt, mama.lt, grynas.lt, zodynas.lt, manodrabuziai.lt, daugakciju.lt, moteris.lt, 5braskes.lt, amazon.com, cnn.com, theregister.co.uk, msn.com, linkedin.com, facebook.com, nytimes.com, wikipedia.org, youtube.com, bbc.co.uk, ebay.co.uk, mashable.com, twitter.com, telegraph.co.uk, independent.co.uk, guardian.co.uk, metro.co.uk, ehow.co.uk, yelp.co.uk, and pinterest.com.

- **Step 3.** The preparation and publication of articles for the most popular and most visited website by Lithuanian immigrants.

The third step of the Internet promotion consisted of articles published on the websites most visited by Lithuanian immigrants – www.londonietis.lt and www.anglija.lt. This step covered mostly Lithuanian media, while Polish media were covered by the University of Warsaw in actions described in Stages 1 and 2.

5. MyCandidate.eu – summary of the promotion campaign.

The media response to the actions undertaken by the liaison team was moderate. There were five articles released on the webpages for Polish communities, one in a Polish magazine, and one radio broadcast of an interview

with the VAA project manager. In relation to the work effort put into searching and contacting all the media, the e-marketing campaign brought better results. The e-marketing carried out with the use of search engines, social media and website banners generated considerably more VAA users than in 2011, when e-marketing was not used so intensively.

There was one interesting minor communication channel which proved helpful in getting in touch with the Polish minority. It was discovered that two out of the five church congregations which were contacted by the liaison team were willing to support the project by informing their congregations about it. Hence, some hundreds of leaflets and some posters were sent to these congregations. However, it cannot be said whether the recipients of leaflets were stimulated to check the website as easily as the users targeted by e-campaigns, who could get onto the myCandidate.eu website with just one click. More information about the website traffic is presented in the section below – *Outcomes. 2. Statistics on the website traffic.*

6. Outcomes

6.1. Registered candidates

There were thirteen Assembly election candidates registered on myCandidate.eu, which represented 6.8% of all of the candidates standing for the London Assembly election. They represented six different political parties, four of them from the London-wide list, the remaining nine from the constituencies. Only one constituency (West Central) had two of their candidates registered.

Each VAA user could compare their questionnaire results with at least four candidates for whom they could conceivably vote. VAA users living in one of seven constituencies had five of their constituency candidates to compare and choose whom to vote for; in one constituency there were six candidates registered on the website.

One candidate who stood for the London Assembly election from the London-wide list and who registered on myCandidate.eu got elected to the Assembly. In general, the registered candidates came from five political parties (three from Labour, three from Green, three from London Liberal Democrats, two from Conservative, two from Christian Peoples Alliance). Four of the candidates stood in the election from the London-wide list, and two from the West Central constituency. One candidate come from each of the following constituencies: Barnet And Camden, Bexley And Bromley, City & East, City And East, Croydon And Sutton, Ealing And Hillingdon, Merton And Wandsworth.

In concluding our observations about the registration of the candidates, one should point out the following:

- The candidates' who registered responded relatively quickly – all of them signed onto myCandidate.eu within one week of receiving the first email.
- One of the registered candidates was reached by facebook, after his e-mail could not be found. He is one of the thirteen who registered on myCandidate.eu.
- None of those to whom information was sent via regular post responded, neither by registering on the website nor in any other way.

6.2. Statistics on the website traffic

The statistics on website traffic given by google Analytics indicate that before the London elections in 2012 the myCandidate.eu website was visited 6,207 times by 5,618 visitors. These figures are relatively high compared to the number of visits in 2011, when there were 900 visits and 625 visitors. Such a significant improvement may well be the result of the intensification of the promotion of the VAA, and particularly of the concentration of the action on London. Besides, the structure of the source of traffic changed notably. While in 2011 60% of the traffic on the website were direct entrances, and 20% came from referral sites and the other 20% from search engines; in 2012 only 12% were direct entrances, while 46% came from referral sites and 42% came from search engines. This comparison shows a notable growth in indirect website entrances, which in turn proves the significant impact of the large-scale e-marketing made in 2012, especially the use of banners on websites and the positioning in search engines.

The dynamics of the visits is also congruent with the run of the e-marketing campaigns, which were intensified two weeks before election day. From the beginning of the campaign on the 6th of April, there were up to 150 visits per day, which on the 22nd of April increased rapidly, and between the 24th of April and the 3rd of May the number of visits fluctuated between 400 and 650 per day.

According to the information available concerning the location of the website users, 5,297 visits out of the 6,207 came from the UK, and 92,5% of them were one time visitors. Users from Poland and Lithuania visited the website 803 times, and 73% of these were new visitors, which may suggest that the remaining 27%, around 216 visits, were made by the project team, viewing and checking the website.

6.3. Conclusions concerning the questionnaire

The questionnaire was answered completely by 823 respondents, which is more than eight times higher in comparison to the 2011 edition, where fewer

than 100 full responses were obtained. It should be noted that only 10% of the answers registered in this edition were 'don't know', while in the previous year's edition it was 18%, i.e. a decrease of 8% in this category. This result may indicate that the lucidity of the questions was improved compared to the 2011 questionnaire. The project team has written a report based on the 2012 questionnaire results. It states that the level of satisfaction of the respondents with the seven areas of social life in question varied – the answers of the 823 participants indicate the areas of social life to which there are not many reservations, such as safety, and those which should become the centre of interest of public authorities, such as tuition fees.⁶

Looking at the results of the questionnaire, the questions can be divided into three groups based on the respondents' overall attitude. These three groups are:

- High-rated questions.

Four of the questions received more positive answers than negative ones. These include questions 1, 2, 3 and 4. Questions 1 and 2 were also asked in the 2011 edition, and then there were more negative answers than in 2012. Answers to questions 3 and 4 regarding safety leads to the conclusion that 'a definite majority of the respondents feels very safe'.⁷ People in general feel that it is safe after dark and that they can count on the police, but in question 4 the respondents were not so clear as in question 3.

- Low-rated questions.

Six of the questions were answered with mostly critical answers, i.e. questions 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13. These questions represent five areas: education, transport, environment, housing, and social resources, which in the view of the respondents are given insufficient attention by the authorities. The critical answers 'might show a need for a different policy than the one currently implemented or planned by public authorities'.⁸

- Questions with ambiguous answers, where the responses did not give an overall indication of whether the respondents are satisfied or not.

These include questions 9 and 14. These questions, with answers not clearly identifiable, are those which were perceived rather differently by var-

⁶ 'VAA for Poles and Lithuanians eligible to vote in UK local election' – survey conducted before the elections for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly Members, Centre For Europe, University of Warsaw, June 2012, p.3, unclassified.

⁷ 'VAA for Poles and Lithuanians eligible to vote in UK local election' – survey conducted before the elections for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly Members, Centre For Europe, University of Warsaw, June 2012, p.4, unclassified.

⁸ 'VAA for Poles and Lithuanians eligible to vote in UK local election' – survey conducted before the elections for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly Members, Centre For Europe, University of Warsaw, June 2012, p.7, unclassified.

ious respondents and the variety of viewpoints becomes evident in the answers to the questions about jobs and social services. It may be observed that there are as many respondents who think there is a job available for everybody as those who disagree. It might be presumed that the answers to question 9 provide an indication how many of the respondents have found work. The social services provided in London satisfy almost half of the respondents, while almost 20% of them do not have an opinion. Question 14 does not indicate a parameter upon which to judge the level of satisfaction and thus it cannot be clearly recognised whether the public opinion is so diverse or whether the result indicates the wide range of interpretation possible for the question itself.

Question number 5 cannot be considered in any of the three categories described above. The proportions between the answers, and especially the high number of 'don't knows', may suggest that the question was not well understood by the respondents and perhaps was more of a comment by the question writer than a real question for the voters to answer. However, the analysis of the actual questionnaire is another issue altogether, which may well be studied as a follow up to the project.

Overall, the survey conducted using the questionnaire may indicate the mood of the public concerning the local community, and in this way indicates to the authorities the expectations of the people who will be voting. Furthermore, the question arises whether the results justify the hypothesis that there is a need for greater involvement of public institutions aimed at strengthening the idea of social justice, equal opportunities, lower costs of life, and sustainable development policies.⁹

The limited data derived from the questionnaire cannot be used to make sweeping statements about the general attitude of the people living in London towards local politics. However, most of all, the response to the questionnaire may suggest that those people who were reached by the VAA project's promotional actions and who visited the myCandidate.eu website expect more involvement on the part of the city authorities, especially with regard to social security and care policymaking. If a tool such as the VAA questionnaire were implemented more widely in London than was the case of myCandidate.eu, the data so derived could potentially be used as a barometer of public opinion.

⁹ 'VAA for Poles and Lithuanians eligible to vote in UK local election' – survey conducted before the elections for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly Members, Centre For Europe, University of Warsaw, June 2012, p.3, unclassified.

Conclusions

The conclusions to this overview of the work involved in the second year of the VAA project can be summed up in the following few observations:

A) There is a correlation between the status of political parties and their openness to online campaigning.

By online campaigning we mean the use of Internet in public communications and electioneering. The VAA can well be considered as an e-campaigning tool. As Chrysa Lamprinakou describes, with this tool '*candidates have actually the opportunity to promote their messages, make their policy stances on various issues known to the voters in their area, increase their recognition and support rates and thus, sell themselves through an easy, hassle-free and mainly cost-free way*'.¹⁰ The use of the Internet in election campaigns seems more developed in the case of national elections due to the mass range and professionalism and to the high profile TV status of the parties involved. Thus, VAAs might be associated most effectively with national campaigning.

However having said that, candidates to local elections could also benefit from the use of a VAA, if only they could see the benefits of e-campaigning alongside their traditional ways such as street stalls and door-to-door campaigns. Two major advantages of the VAA in local elections are, firstly, that there are no costs to the candidate and party nor to the voter; and secondly that there is equal opportunity for access to everyone everywhere, particularly in the case of London, where access to the Internet is provided in a great number of social centres and libraries.

Thus, free access means that any candidate can add the use of VAA to their agenda without any extra costs, while equal access means VAA gives candidates exposure without the supremacy represented by the most influential political parties and local activists, who already hold power in the constituency. Nonetheless, in order to take advantage of these opportunities the essential prerequisites are an awareness of e-campaigning (on the part of both candidates and voters) and a willingness to use VAA as a tool. Contemporary research indicates that there is a significant shift in local campaigning towards modern modes of electioneering.¹¹ Chrysa Lamprinakou's study – already quoted above – and others would appear to indicate that local elections are going online, while the experience of myCandidate.eu provides somewhat different observations.

¹⁰ C. Lamprinakou, *Exploring new opportunities: VAA as a tool of political marketing in: Europeanisation of political rights: Voter Advice Application and migrant mobilisation in 2011 UK elections*, eds. A. Dziewulska, A.M. Ostrowska, Warsaw 2012, p. 18.

¹¹ C. Lamprinakou, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

Although electronic communication with all the Assembly candidates for election was not possible, some of those candidates who shared their e-mail and were contacted this way did get involved in the project by registering on myCandidate.eu, while attempts to establish contact with other candidates by regular post brought no results whatsoever, considering that none of them registered on the website. It cannot be judged whether the snail mail actually reached them or not, and it has to be mentioned that 20 out of the 86 letters sent by regular post were returned to sender with the postal annotation ‘not known at this address’, which raises interesting questions concerning the validity of the addresses given for candidates and the real availability of such candidates to take part in democratic practices. None of the persons who received the regular post joined the project, while 16,25% of the candidates contacted by e-mail did so.

The percentage of e-mail addresses NOT made public by political parties is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Missing e-mail addresses per political party vs. assembly election results

Political party	Number of candidates with e-mail addresses NOT published	Number of candidates	% of candidates' e-mails NOT published per party	Party's % of the constituency candidates elected to the Assembly (number of seats won)	Party's % of seats won in the London-wide list (number of seats)	Total number of seats won in the London Assembly
Labour Party	22	1	4.5	57.15 (4 seats)	41.14 (8 seats)	12
Green Party	23	2	8.7		8.64	2
London Liberal Democrats	22	3	13.6		6.79	2
Conservative Party	26	7	26.9	42.85 (3 seats)	31.99 (6 seats)	9
Trade Unionist And Socialist Coalition	8	5	62.5		0.80	
English Democrats	9	6	66.7		0.99	
National Front Putting Londoners First	6	4	66.7		0.36	
UK Independence Party: Fresh Choice for London	22	15	68.2		4.52	
Christian Peoples Alliance	25	19	76.0		1.75	
British National Party	16	13	81.3		2.12	
Communist League	1	1	100.0		X***	
Communities United Party	1	1	100.0		X	

Political party	Number of candidates with e-mail addresses NOT published	Number of candidates	% of candidates' e-mails NOT published per party	Party's % of the constituency candidates elected to the Assembly (number of seats won)	Party's % of seats won in the London-wide list (number of	Total number of seats won in the London Assembly
Greenwich and Lewisham People Before Profit	1	1	100.0		X	
Residents' Association of London Official	1	1	100.0		X	
The House Party	1	1	100.0		0.37	
The Socialist Party of Great Britain	2	2	100.0		X	
Independent	4*	4	100.0		0.63**	
Grand Total	190	86	–	–	–	25

* There were four independent candidates, two of them standing for election in the London-wide list and two from constituencies.

** The support gained by two out of four independent candidates, who stood in the London-wide list.

*** There were no London-wide candidates standing for election from these fractions.

Source: The data presented in columns 4, 5, 6 comes from '2012 election results for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly', London Elects, The Office of the Greater London Returning Officer. Columns 1-3 were prepared by the project team on the basis of an Internet search.

Table 3 is sorted from the smallest number of unpublished e-mail addresses to the largest. The rows in bold print represent those political parties whose candidates used myCandidate.eu. The constituency candidates (column 4) were polled with First Past the Post system, which means that the candidate who receives the most votes in the constituency enters the Assembly. To choose candidates from the London-wide list, there is a formula which links this list to the support that candidates of the same party received in their constituencies. The final number of candidates from each party who got seats in Assembly is presented in column 6.

While another level of our observations focuses more on those who did not share an e-mail address, first the missing e-mail issue should be explained in more detail. The decision as to whether a candidate posted her/his e-mail address on the web was calculated on the basis of our liaison team's research. There was an assumption made that if an email could not be found after several attempts, it is not shared with the public. This assurance arose from the

team's experience in searching the data on elections and candidates in both 2011 and 2012. Upon perusing more closely the 'published or not' e-mail issue as presented in Table 3, some interesting hypotheses can be put forth:

Firstly, the candidates who are least likely to share their email with the public are the independents, or those candidates belonging to smaller and less powerful political parties. It cannot be stated how they responded to VAA, because there was simply a one-sided interest on the part of the project team, with letters sent by post and no feedback received. Since this group of candidates does not use electronic communication in their campaigns, neither are they potential VAA users. This raises the question as to why they are not willing to share an email address or whether they even have email addresses, and their willingness to be present in the virtual space. It would appear that the candidates of these parties have not, or do not, consider the Internet as a space for communication with the voters of their constituencies, and that these candidates and parties continue to focus only on the traditional campaign methodology such as direct communication and leaflets.

Secondly, the most popular political parties are more likely to use electronic communication in the campaign, which may be a result of political party discipline or may simply be a common practice for them. We could even risk surmising whether the use of electronic communication is in itself an indication of probable success in the twenty first century, especially when there are those who maintain that the US presidential elections may have been won via the use of social networks. Thus, politicians belonging to big parties mostly published email addresses, while the candidates who stand for election from smaller fractions or are independent and publish their e-mail are in the distinct minority. In fact all these candidates stand for the same local election, yet only a small percentage of them could be reached by e-mail. This is based on the supposition that inasmuch as only some candidates allowed themselves the opportunity to be informed by e-mail about the VAA, by the same token they do not give a chance to voters to contact them electronically. Consequently it can be said that only some candidates increased the reach of their campaigns by using the Internet.

Thirdly, most of the candidates who used myCandidate.eu are from the most popular UK-wide political parties. The four main political parties (Labour, Conservative, Green, Liberal Democrats) have local campaigns developed almost to the extent of their national campaigns, and candidates from their parties became interested in myCandidate.eu. Despite the fact that the party leaders did not give official support to the myCandidate.eu project nor incorporate it into their campaign agenda, there were candidates within these parties who used VAA. This meant they were able to make use of the information received and present themselves to almost 6000 visitors.

Fourthly, the findings presented above, when combined with the election results, confirm that those political fractions which are more likely to use electronic communication in their campaigning and in this way were more likely to use VAA, apparently received the most support from voters. This supposition, however, should not be treated as proof to explain the popularity of a political party. The London Assembly election results are conditioned by different factors such as historical considerations, the two-party domination system, the single-member constituency voting system, and the number of candidates the party put out. Also the public service and political party leaders on a local level, which myCandidate.eu tried to reach, were well represented by the biggest parties. The conclusion that the leading political parties are at the same time the ones which tend to use Internet campaigning should be rather a hint for those who work on VAAs. This tool was created for both voters and candidates and it can empower candidates especially to become known to the public, even with little party support or resources. Candidates with limited awareness of using Internet communication and not much openness to non-political initiatives will find it even harder to get into the political debate and to be heard. If VAA is to serve all candidates, there should be an approach elaborated on how to get to those candidates who are less open to the Internet, and how to develop campaigning in the EU which does not have to be passed on to the PR experts and prime time holders.

The data analysed in Table 3, shows one exception to our argument. The Christian Peoples Alliance is a party with one of the lowest rates of e-mails published by its candidates, and in spite of this two out of six electronically contacted candidates joined myCandidate.eu. Even though the party did not get any seats in the Assembly, it got moderate support and placed almost in the middle in the London-wide list results.

The second supposition regards the fact that no candidates standing for the Mayoral election registered on myCandidate.eu, and it appeared to be practically impossible to get Mayoral election candidates to register there on. Is there a glass floor which blocks the way to the candidates, or was it our communication that failed? The liaison team was aware of the fact that reaching the candidates for the Mayoral Election might be difficult, since they are top politicians and probably difficult to get in close contact with before the election for a small player such as a project team. Indeed, this difficulty was based on something different from those difficulties encountered in the case of the other local election candidates, who simply were not very keen on online campaigning.

The scheme for modernisation of a campaign adopted by Fisher and Denver from Farrell and Webb for their research on district-level campaigning highlights three development dimensions: technical development, using the

resources and professional staff involved, and targeting individual voters.¹² These dimensions evolve in three stages and at the last one the local campaign is characterised by the replacement of traditional techniques with technology, relying on specialist staff, increasing its role in comparison to national campaigns.¹³ We would allow ourselves to postulate that if any local campaign in UK can be identified as being at the third and last stage described by Fisher and Denver, that would be the Mayoral election in London. From the VAA project perspective, the technological development dimension in this model is the most interesting, because it opens up the promise that at least Mayoral candidates would be aware of the advantages of using technology and thereby also VAA. Nonetheless, the difficulty we encountered arose from another dimension, which concerns resources. In the matter of communication and campaign agendas, myCandidate.eu simply could not get through to the Mayoral candidates. Having regard to this high level of campaign professionalism, there was little chance of getting on the candidate's desk with information about the project a month before the Election Day. The myCandidate.eu website is not yet a widely recognised brand, so there was not much likelihood that the candidates would be, or would rapidly become, familiar with the project. The registration on the website could not be done by anybody other than the candidate him/ herself, which meant that the candidates' agents could not authorise the answers to the questionnaire, an obligatory authorization for completing the registration. The other explanation is that the political party agenda, which is set many months in advance, was not open to incorporating emerging campaign opportunities and hence our project was simply skipped over. Despite that, the team decided to try contacting each Mayoral candidate as well as their offices and people working on their campaigns.

Another important reason we noticed why nobody from the Mayoral elections responded is that none of the candidates or their agents saw myCandidate.eu as an initiative which could pay back in relation to the scale of their expectations. This issue is discussed more in the next conclusion.

B) There is more data needed on the target groups to empower non-nationals living in the UK to engage in local level policy making.

This supposition concerns the numerical data on the target groups. The primary assumption of the project team was that the number of Poles and Lithuanians living in the UK can be only estimated with a large margin of

¹² J. Fisher, D. Denver, *From Foot-slogging to Call Centres and Direct Mail: A framework for Analysing the development of District Level Campaigning*, "European Journal of Political Research", No. 47/2008, pp.800–801.

¹³ J. Fisher, D. Denver, *op.cit.*, p. 821.

tolerance, and that there could be from 400 thousand to up to 1 million Poles, and up to 50 thousand Lithuanians, living in UK. This wide variation for Poles springs from the complexity of the waves of migrations which occurred in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁴ The official data of the Office for National Statistics in the UK, based on the Worker Registration Scheme, indicated that there were 328 thousand Poles and 55 thousand Lithuanians registered at the end of 2006. Poles made up 64,4% of all A8 nationals,¹⁵ and Lithuanians 10,7%, thus the total for these nationalities was 75% of A8 emigration to the UK.¹⁶ The data on the migration dynamics available up to 2010 suggests that in the four years following 2006 there could have been more than 200,000 A8 arrivals net, so approximately 150,000 of them may well have come from Poland and Lithuania.¹⁷ BBC News UK quotes the recent census data showing the growth of the percentage of the residents in Britain born outside of the country. It reached 13% in 2011, a figure which is 3 million larger than ten years previously. It also says that 'London has become the first region where white British people have become a minority'.¹⁸ At the same time, 'Gazeta Wyborcza' reported, on the basis of the same census, that the number of Poles living in the UK grew tenfold between 2001 and 2011. In England and Wales Poles make up the third largest group after the native British and Hindu, with 579 thousand UK residents declaring themselves as Polish. The unverified estimations of the academics speak of an even higher number, perhaps up to 700 thousand.¹⁹

The Office for National Statistics report also distinguishes the migration by local administrative districts and recognises about 294 thousand registered A8 nationals living in the City of London in 2006.²⁰ By the time of the local election in London in 2012, the project team could calculate also that there are 22,500 adult Lithuanian and 70,000 adult Poles living within 50 miles of

¹⁴ A. Dziewulska, K. Wojdelko, *Why myCandidate.eu?* in: *Europeanisation of political rights: Voter Advice Application and migrant mobilisation in 2011 UK elections*, eds. A. Dziewulska, A.M. Ostrowska, Warsaw 2012, p. 71.

¹⁵ A8 nationals – citizens of the eight Central and Eastern Europe countries that joined the EU in 2004 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary).

¹⁶ V. Bauere, P. Densham, J. Millar, J. Salt, *Migrants from central and eastern Europe: local geographies*, Office for National Statistics, Population Trends 129, Autumn 2007, p. 11.

¹⁷ Office for National Statistics, Long-Term International Migration, estimates from International Passenger Survey, time series 1991–2010, Table 1.02, November 2011.

¹⁸ *Census shows rise in foreign-born*, BBC News UK 11.12.2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20677515> (14.12.2012).

¹⁹ Jacek Pawlicki, *Od 2001 liczba Polaków w Anglii wzrosła dziesięciokrotnie. Bez nas ich rynek pracy by padł (Since 2001 the number of Poles in England Has risen by ten Times. Without us their labour market would crash)*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 13.12.2012.

²⁰ V. Bauere, P. Densham, J. Millar, J. Salt, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

London who are registered on facebook. Additional data acquired from the facebook marketing campaign indicates that there are 6.8 million English-speaking adults living within 50 miles of London and using facebook. This number can be compared to the United Nations official data on the London agglomeration, calculating 8.9 million inhabitants in 2010.²¹ These statistics were of interest for the project team as the VAA was advertised in English for all the inhabitants of London, even though the main funding went to popularizing myCandidate.eu among Poles and Lithuanians.

If the project team were able to conduct more research and provide more specific data on these two groups, the Voter Advice Application could foreseeably have more impact as a policy-making device. The figures on the Polish and Lithuanian communities in the UK could then be correlated with their opinions, and these together would give politicians feedback on their voters' needs and electoral potential. One disadvantageous conclusion, however, concerns the apparent lack of interest in Poles and Lithuanians among the political circles, which could be linked with the lack of statistical data. Based on our experience, the politicians we were able to contact standing for local election in the UK were not particularly concerned about the myCandidate.eu targeted groups of voters. This may suggest that political groups do not see the demographic potential of these two minorities, so politicians do not make a bid concerning them during the elections. This demonstrates the importance of carrying out research on these groups, which could enable them to become a part of policy making in UK. There may well be other influences and points of view concerning the possibilities of Poles and Lithuanians as potential voters, some of which are interestingly described in another publication.²²

Thus, there is room for more studies on Poles and Lithuanians in the UK, involving sociologists and doing the statistical research to give the VAA tool more practical applications. So far, the main ambition of the VAA in 2012 was to help voters to get to know their candidates.

C) If VAA is used in local elections, the bottom-up approach for one city/region is recommended in order to match the tool and its marketing to the specific local conditions.

The choice of London in 2012 was an appropriate choice. Since there are substantial Polish and Lithuanian communities there as well as media dedicated to them, the project team could set the correct marketing direction and gain a plethora of website users. There was also a significant improvement

²¹ World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, April 2012.

²² K. Stańczuk, *In Defence of Anecdotal Evidence* in: *New Neighbours – on the diversity of migrants' political involvement*, eds. A. Dziewulska, A.M. Ostrowska, Warsaw 2012.

in getting London candidates to register on the VAA compared to the more generic attempts of the previous year. Perhaps most importantly, the questionnaire could be matched with local issues, so the VAA questions responded better to the place itself, which could be crucial for local elections.

All in all this may suggest that if the VAA is designed for local elections it is more favourable to construct it using a bottom-up rather than top-down approach. In spite of the fact that the VAA open source code allows the tool to be introduced on a large scale, particular attention should be paid to the local context. In dealing with issues such as the dissemination of information among politicians, construction of the questionnaire, and reaching voters it appears crucial to grasp the local specifics and circumstances.

At this point, the question arises whether a single VAA for each local election would not be a too cost-intensive and sophisticated enterprise. At this stage it is worthwhile considering building one universal platform, which would have the capacity to create many VAAs across the EU for different elections and administration units. Such a platform could be operated by interaction with the initiators of the VAA, who would use the platform to generate a specific VAA for each election. This idea and others, which are the result of the experience of the myCandidate.eu project, will be evolved and developed in this last section of these conclusions.

D) A proposal for the establishment of a platform which could serve for all kinds of elections EU wide.

In 2011, at the beginning of the myCandidate.eu project, we received feedback from the Liberal Democrats party, who asked why they should launch myCandidate.eu if there is already a VAA in the UK? What was meant in that case was a tool called Vote Match,²³ and even though this application was not active for UK local elections in 2011 (indeed it was active for Ireland only), this does not affect the appropriateness of the question raised by the LibDem. Why overlapping VAAs?

Taking into account the experiences derived from the project there might be a proposal made for further research both on studies on the VAA, as well as on Polish and Lithuanian minorities living in the UK. A variety of migration studies concerning movements within the EU can be positively continued under the agenda of VAA tools, since these tools aim to increase civic participation and democratic involvement, both important issues related to migration. Considering the VAA itself, we believe that some of its aspects suggest that the next possible step for VAA development studies could be a EU-wide platform aggregating the previous achievements and findings.

²³ www.votematch.org.uk

Our insight is based on our awareness of several features which would give the platform a maximum utility and efficiency.

Firstly, there would be one highly developed IT system set up on a platform where the VAAs could be developed. The capacity and sophistication of such a system would demand considerable technical input, but at the same time it would be a single capital expenditure, which would give users the highest possible functionality. The upkeep of VAA and server costs are not high; the system needs good initial IT expertise working on the authorization system, administration panel and layout instead.

Secondly, the platform would allow the non-profit sector to generate their own VAAs for particular elections. Such organizations, which could take the initiative of introducing the VAA in a certain election, could concern themselves with the questionnaire and the target groups, without the need to develop their own IT.

Thirdly, we propose that the platform holder be a civic organization or a university, which would credit the system with its public trust and reputation. It could also be an EU institution, but the fear here is that then the project would be perceived as not completely impartial by some, the EU being a political institution in addition to its other dimensions. The holder would engage in creating a common brand awareness across the EU, which would raise interest about the tool and upgrade the state of general knowledge about its advantages and goals. Then organizations generating VAAs would need to focus only on the election they are working on and reaching the politicians, voters, and media marketing. In order to make the VAA visible in Europe, these would make two parallel streams of communication, one top-down and one bottom-up.

There are many reasons which militate in favour of this proposal. With one system, the costs of IT implementation would be reduced, while at the same time the quality of the system would be improved. Certain groups, including academics, NGOs and political fractions would have access to do VAAs. The standardization would increase the clarity and establish the recognition of VAAs, something crucial for those candidates who are not very likely to use the Internet in their campaigns. Finally, the VAA would become a cheap and accessible environment of its own which, while interacting with the civil society and boosting its involvement, would provide formidable research potential.

Considering all the advantages pointed out above, one might still be sceptical about the possibility of creating just one VAA for the whole of Europe. This may be due to the fact that some currently operating VAAs are not 'voter-to-candidate' systems but 'voter-to-party' ones which – although less precise or useful for voters – are easier to make. The second reason lies in

the fact that there might be two or more teams wanting to use the software for the project and in fact it often happens that there are competing projects relating to the same elections. Still, we believe our proposal withstands the challenge, as making software and its hosting available to all would mean that the popularity of VAAs would grow, and it is demonstrated that they can contribute to raising election turnout, so badly needed in Europe nowadays.